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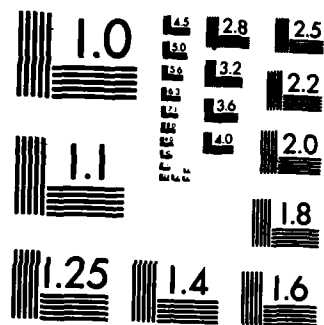
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## CHINA'S ROLE IN PACIFIC BASIN SECURITY\*

Jonathan D. Pollack

May 1984

Among the states of East Asia and the Pacific, the greatest uncertainties and imponderables attach to China. No nation in the postwar international system has shifted its political and strategic position more frequently or more sharply; this pattern of change contributes both to the attention accorded China and to the repeated doubts expressed about the prospects for stability in China's internal and external policies. The inability to define and maintain a consistent, long-term policy course reflects China's recurrent political and economic debates and East Asia's centrality in the conflicts and crises of the postwar era. Lacking the geographic and political neatness of the postwar division of Europe, and faced with major internal upheavals throughout the region, East Asia became the major battleground involving U.S. military forces during the 1950s and 1960s, with China cast by Washington as the principal villain. Without a consensual framework for major power interactions in the region--indeed, with China's political legitimacy directly challenged by the United States--it seems little wonder that the first decades of communist rule in China were characterized by instability and international conflict.

By any measure, China's politics and prospects in the early 1980s represent a distinct improvement over the past. The Chinese no longer challenge the legitimacy of the international order that long sought to exclude them. Under the aegis of Deng Xiaoping, China has undertaken policy changes that less than a decade ago would have been judged ideologically treasonous and politically suicidal. Indeed, despite repeated expressions of concern about the stability of the Deng

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\*This essay will appear in *Survival*, July-August 1984. It will also be published in Claude Buss, ed., *National Security Interests in the Pacific Basin*, Stanford: The Hoover Institution Press, 1984.

leadership in China, Deng has now held power longer than any American president since Eisenhower.

The Chinese have also begun to come to terms with the economic, political, and technological price paid for two decades of internal turmoil and strident, exclusionary external policies. The largest questions confronting leaders in Peking for the remainder of this century will concern the resiliency of their policy framework and the adaptability of their political and economic institutions. Can a Leninist organizational system permit sustained economic growth without engendering widespread societal and political upheaval? Will the mechanisms of central state power permit the devolution of authority needed to spur individual initiative? Can China adapt to the technological and economic advances of the West and of its neighbors in the Pacific Basin without generating visceral or excessively nationalistic political responses?

An additional set of issues concerns the prospects for stability and security in the West Pacific. How fully will China contribute to the realization of these goals? What will be the effects of China's modernization effort on Chinese attitudes and policies toward its neighbors? How is Soviet and American conduct in the region likely to influence Chinese thinking and policies? To address these questions, this essay will explore four interrelated issues: 1) China's strategic significance and power prospects; 2) the PRC's orientation toward both superpowers, especially in relation to U.S. and Soviet policy within the region; 3) China's relations with the regional communist powers (Vietnam and North Korea); and 4) China's strategy toward its non-communist neighbors.

## ASSESSING CHINA'S STRATEGIC ROLE

Scholars and practitioners alike remain deeply divided over China's role and significance in the contemporary international system.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>For my own views, see "China's Potential as a World Power," *International Journal*, Summer 1980, pp. 580-595; "China in the Evolving International System," in Norton Ginsburg and Bernard Lalor (eds.),

intellectual debate about China's power potential and security role remains very skewed, since these differences reflect policy debates in the West about China's political and strategic importance. The range of opinion is wide and contradictory.

1. China is a regional power that poses no threat to its neighbors; with sufficient assistance from the West, it will become a credible major power supportive of U.S. goals and interests in East Asia.
2. China is militarily weak and backward, and therefore not a credible collaborator with the West in restraining the exercise of Soviet power.
3. China is weak and highly vulnerable to Soviet political and military pressure; thus Peking has no alternative to relying on U.S. power for enhancing its security.
4. China may appear weak, but its long-term objective is to be the dominant power of the Asia-Pacific region, thus setting limits on Western identification with China's underlying power ambitions.
5. China adheres resolutely to its foreign policy principles; it will never work behind the backs of its friends out of short-term expediency.
6. The Chinese are perpetually changing their policy course; thus the West must deal cautiously with China, lest any assistance (especially in the military area) work against Western interests.
7. The Chinese are discerning, unsentimental practitioners of realpolitik; the United States can deal with China precisely because of this strategic acumen.
8. Chinese diplomatic practice is marked principally by duplicity, chicanery, deception, and flattery; its leaders possess neither scruples nor strategic vision, and will not long remain committed to their present alignment with the West.

*China: The Eighties Era*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1984; and "China and the Global Strategic Balance," in Harry Harding (ed.), *China's Foreign Relations in the 1980s*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1984.

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9. China is weak and divided internally; thus the West cannot depend on the orderly development of its society, polity, and economy.
10. China may be relatively weak and backward at present, but in the larger, longer picture it will be a powerful, more advanced society with whom the West must maintain close relations.

China seems almost an international chameleon; it is all things to all people. Yet the very divergence of the debate reflects China's strategic significance. If the Chinese devote their minds and energies to playing a major international role it is impossible for a state of such size, numbers, and absolute economic and military power not to assume substantial political and strategic importance. The unresolved issues concern the dimensions of this role and its implications for international security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

Judgments about China in terms of pure power capabilities are therefore misleading. In comparison with its non-communist neighbors, China is economically and technologically backward, but that does not make China strategically insignificant. Similar arguments can be made about the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union's economic performance and *per capita* GNP lag well behind that of the major European powers as well as the United States and Japan, but these shortcomings do not call into question the Soviet Union's credentials as a superpower. In addition, the Chinese have repeatedly been at the forefront of great power rivalries and conflicts, beginning with the creation of the Sino-Soviet alliance and China's entry into the Korean War. For two decades, the United States deployed naval, air, and strategic forces against China. For the past decade and a half, the Soviet Union has committed major ground, air, naval, and strategic forces against the PRC. Thus, the superpowers have never doubted China's strategic importance, especially in relation to China's likely wartime behavior.

An additional issue concerns power potential. Despite China's relative underdevelopment, the Chinese economy already generates substantial resources for national needs, including defense. Strategically unimportant nations do not produce in excess of 5,000



combat aircraft or test and deploy ICBMs. Dwight Perkins has demonstrated the logic of a compound interest model of national power.<sup>2</sup> If China continues to sustain economic growth rates comparable to those attained in its first three and a half decades, and if China is prepared to commit approximately the same portion of its gross national product to its defense effort as it did in the 1970s, then by the year 2000 China will allocate approximately \$100 billion in current dollars to defense expenditure. Nor are issues of technological sophistication and skilled manpower insurmountable obstacles, especially in view of the availability of advanced technology from abroad and the present opportunities for training new generations of skilled manpower in the West.

However, China is now at an international crossroads. China's embroilment in some of the principal geopolitical conflicts of the postwar era elevated the PRC to major power status, but it also exacted a substantial political and economic price. Leaders in Peking realize that their economic prospects are far better served by the avoidance or amelioration of external conflict and confrontation. This has led China to attempt to diminish tensions with its neighbors, including the Soviet Union. Even in the absence of major change in Peking's political and military rivalries with Moscow and Hanoi, Chinese policies toward both the Soviet Union and Vietnam are far less strident and confrontational than in the late 1970s.

In relation to non-communist Asia, the PRC has decided that its interests are better served by accommodation than by confrontation. China must make up for two decades of lost time, yet it is still struggling to devise a system of incentives and rewards essential to technological innovation and economic growth. If China is to achieve sustained progress in reestablishing its educational system, modernizing its factories, developing its energy resources, improving the standard of living of its citizens, and training more technically proficient

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<sup>2</sup>See Perkins, "The International Consequences of China's Economic Development," in Richard Solomon (ed.), *The China Factor*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981, especially pp. 132-135; and "The Economic Background and Implications for China," in Herbert Ellison (ed.), *The Sino-Soviet Conflict: A Global Perspective*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1982, especially pp. 100-110.

managers and workers, it cannot do so on the basis of exclusionary policies or in an atmosphere of acute international tension.

Thus, China's leaders acknowledge that their development efforts will require "a peaceful international environment." Heightened tensions in either Asia or the Pacific or major war would dramatically affect the PRC's economic and political prospects for the remainder of this century and beyond. Above all, the Chinese recognize that their security prospects will continue to derive from their relations with the superpowers and the role of Soviet and American power in the region.

### CHINA AND THE SUPERPOWERS

Notwithstanding Peking's ritualistic attacks on "the hegemonism of the two superpowers," the Chinese understand that American and Soviet power set these two states apart from all others, and that China cannot afford the risks and uncertainties of excessively provoking either or both. Although China has at times adopted a "plague on both your houses" mentality (notably during the 1960s), a strategy of isolation and estrangement from Washington and Moscow is inherently dangerous for Peking's security interests. The Chinese also understand that close alignment with either global power at the expense of the other is not a workable long-term strategy. As the Chinese noted in their polemical exchanges with Moscow in 1963, China's position as junior partner in the Sino-Soviet alliance placed the PRC on "the frontline of the struggle against American imperialism," precluding extensive Chinese economic and political dealings with the non-communist states along its periphery.

U.S. policy toward the PRC in the 1950s and 1960s reinforced this isolation. America's strategy toward China pursued two broad objectives: the political and military encirclement of China (implemented by the forward deployment of U.S. naval and air forces and the establishment of bases and alliances throughout the West Pacific) and the prevention of the consolidation of communist control in Southeast and Northeast Asia. For both economic and security reasons, China had no credible alternative but to focus its attention on Asia rather than the Pacific. To diminish the direct U.S. threat to Chinese

security and territorial sovereignty, China dealt largely with the other Asian communist states and parties. One can speculate about the "what if" questions had North Korea not invaded the South, but the sequence of events on the Korean peninsula between June and October of 1950 froze the regional security environment for the next two decades, and precluded meaningful Chinese relations with most of its non-communist neighbors to the east and south.

The Nixon initiatives toward the Chinese unfroze this pattern. China's initial efforts to overcome the diplomatic and economic isolation of the Cultural Revolution also contributed to this process, but it was America's strategic reassessment in Asia that propelled this change. China could now begin to deal far more fully with its neighbors, unconstrained by American political and military opposition. Even if the Nixon Administration sought to improve relations with Peking for broader strategic reasons, the implications were more regional than global. For the first time, China could look to the Pacific, even as it remained principally an Asian power.

Changes in Soviet foreign and military policy since the mid-1960s, however, further transformed the East Asian political and strategic landscape. America's retrenchment was accompanied by Soviet advancement, with China the proximate cause in both cases. The buildup of Soviet ground and air forces, principally facing China's northeastern provinces, made China's relations with the USSR a security issue as well as an ideological and political one. The steady expansion and improvement in Soviet naval and strategic capabilities during the 1970s underscored the Soviet Union's emergence as a two-front power. Even if other factors also helped spur the Soviet buildup in the east (specifically, U.S. forward based naval power and the U.S. base and alliance system in Northeast Asia), Moscow had signalled its determination to remain an Asian power. Unlike the Americans, who were deployed principally in the Pacific and who had avoided major conflict with the Chinese since the end of the Korean War, the Soviets posed an immediate, land-based challenge to Chinese security. Moreover, Moscow had built up its military assets in Asia without diminishing its force levels in Europe.

This ominous strategic pattern found Washington and Peking moving toward an informal security coalition in the late 1970s and the early 1980s.<sup>3</sup> China seemed closer to aligning with one of two superpowers than at any point since the Sino-Soviet alliance. These dealings were based on mutual need. China, militarily vulnerable and technologically and economically backward after two decades of internal political convulsion, confronted a growing Soviet presence to the north (the Sino-Soviet border), east (the Soviet Pacific fleet), south (in Indochina), and west (in Afghanistan). The United States, having designated the Persian Gulf as a vital strategic interest in the wake of the fall of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, urgently needed stability on other vital fronts. Moreover, the Chinese kept large numbers of Soviet and Vietnamese troops committed along the PRC's northern and southern borders. Although the Chinese could not prevent Soviet expansion in the Third World and had no incentive to initiate hostilities with Moscow, they did complicate Soviet force planning, and diminished U.S. military requirements in the West Pacific. In addition, the Chinese provided tacit support for the U.S. political and military presence in the region. It was a reasonable bargain for both states, but it did not constitute the beginnings of a Sino-American alliance. China's leaders had an almost neuralgic aversion toward any steps that impinged upon their freedom of action. They further recognized that higher levels of Sino-American security association might needlessly provoke the Soviet Union, possibly leading to heightened tensions in Northeast Asia.

No matter how grandiose China's united front rhetoric, the Chinese sought to restrain the Soviet exercise of power, not goad Moscow into preemptive action against the PRC. Collaborative actions with the West were intended to complicate Moscow's consolidation of its geopolitical gains in both Southeast and Southwest Asia, diminish Soviet pressure against China, and temper or deter further Soviet actions in areas of instability. An informal security coalition with the West also made

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<sup>3</sup>For a detailed assessment, see Jonathan D. Pollack, *The Lessons of Coalition Politics: Sino-American Security Relations*, The Rand Corporation, R-3133-AF, February 1984.

possible a significant infusion of advanced technology for China's industrial and military modernization. The United States had thus accorded China an independent political and military weight. Such strategic developments proved worrisome to some Asian states, since they appeared to portend a much larger Chinese political and military role in East Asia, seemingly sanctioned by the United States. These concerns were understandable but somewhat exaggerated. The United States may have acquiesced to China's military moves against Vietnam, but a larger strategic design for Sino-American relations was still lacking. Not only did China express repeated wariness about entering into an overly encumbering relationship with the United States; opinions in Washington remained deeply divided over the wisdom of and prospects for a security coalition between the United States and China.

This latter issue has remained a complicating factor for both the United States and China. From the time of the initial Nixon-Kissinger breakthroughs with Peking, the Chinese have learned a great deal about the vicissitudes of the U.S. political process. These uncertainties have found expression in a number of areas, notably the Taiwan arms sale issue and debates over technology transfer to the PRC. In their most fundamental sense, these issues reduce to several critical factors: How important is China for American strategic and regional interests? Does China need America more than America needs China? In the absence of a Chinese capability to project its military power, what can the United States expect from China in dealing with a multi-front challenge from the Soviet Union?

With the renewed suspicions and tensions between Peking and Washington evident in the early 1980s, relations deteriorated sharply. For a period of time in 1982, the increasingly strident atmosphere of Sino-American relations threatened to undermine China's acceptance of the U.S. political and military posture in the West Pacific. Both states stood to lose more than they could possibly gain. Indeed, the USSR was the one state that clearly benefited by this instability, since it no longer had to weigh as seriously the possible effects of its behavior on U.S.-Chinese relations.

During 1983, however, Sino-American relations returned to a steadier footing. The previous U.S. emphasis on China's strategic potential was supplanted by a recognition of China's role as a modernizing, regional power. Washington still recognized areas of strategic convergence with Peking, but Japan, not China, was judged the economic and strategic centerpiece of U.S. Asian policy.<sup>4</sup> Although the Chinese resented being characterized in regional terms, such a revised course indicated to Peking that the United States did not intend to use China as a pawn in the U.S.-Soviet global rivalry. It also shifted the focus of U.S. China policy toward America's role and interests in China's modernization, in particular the issue of technology transfer. The visit of Defense Secretary Weinberger in September 1983 signalled China's readiness to resume the aborted defense dialogue with the United States and to recognize the continuing congruence of U.S. and Chinese interests. It was followed by the reciprocal visits of Premier Zhao Ziyang to the United States in January 1984 and President Reagan to China in April 1984, thereby underscoring the determination of both states to avoid a damaging deterioration in relations.

These developments, however, did not portend the reconstitution of a Sino-American united front in East Asia. The Chinese repeatedly conveyed that their security interests were better served by standing somewhat apart from the United States, rather than being closely aligned with it. This posture presumed that the challenges to PRC security were manageable. During fall of 1982, the Chinese had consented to the initiation of Sino-Soviet consultations at the vice foreign minister level. Peking had held out the prospect of improved Sino-Soviet relations if Moscow demonstrated a willingness to diminish the Soviet threat to China. Such overtures, however, had also been intended as a demonstration of China's capacity to deal independently with the Soviet Union (thereby sending an important signal to Washington), rather than out of any expectation that a new leader in the Kremlin would be more forthcoming than his predecessor. Indeed, China consented to these

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<sup>4</sup>For an excellent interpretive synthesis, see Richard Nations, "A Tilt towards Tokyo," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 21, 1983, pp. 36-40.

discussions only after reaching agreement with the United States in August 1982 on an explicit formula for continued U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.

By undertaking these negotiations, the Chinese had concluded that Moscow would be more likely to normalize relations with China if Sino-Soviet interstate relations were separated from the broader Sino-Soviet security rivalry. Indeed, the Soviet Union had long sought to decouple its political and economic ties with the Chinese from their larger strategic differences. As one leading Chinese strategist has argued:

On the one hand, China opposes [the superpowers'] hegemonism and on the other, China will maintain and develop relations with both of them on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence. China is seeking to achieve the normalization of relations between itself and the Soviet Union and all this requires [!] is for the Soviet Union to eliminate threats to China's security.<sup>5</sup>

This argument is somewhat disingenuous, since the future of Sino-Soviet relations cannot be separated from the broader strategic context governing the Moscow-Peking relationship.<sup>6</sup> It is possible that in the atmosphere of crisis of the late 1970s the Chinese feared major Soviet advances in both Southeast and Southwest Asia, but that Moscow's inability to consolidate its position subsequently diminished Chinese anxieties. Under such circumstances, some leaders in Peking apparently believed that Moscow would be looking for opportunities to diminish its multiple security demands and pressures, especially in relation to the renewed heightening of the Soviet-American global competition.

These expectations were not met. A more correct tone was established in Sino-Soviet relations during 1982 and 1983, including higher levels of trade, increased scientific, cultural, and athletic contacts, and a noticeable decline in the polemics between Moscow and

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<sup>5</sup>Pei Monong, "China's Future Role in Asia," *Shijie Zhishi* [World Knowledge], No. 10, May 16, 1983, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report - China* [FBIS-China], July 22, 1983, p. A6.

<sup>6</sup>For a detailed analysis, see Jonathan D. Pollack, *The Sino-Soviet Rivalry and Chinese Security Debate*, The Rand Corporation, R-2907-AF, October 1982.

Peking. But the Soviet Union proved unyielding on what the Chinese described as the larger obstacles to improved Sino-Soviet relations (the Soviet military presence along the Sino-Soviet border and in Mongolia, including the SS-20s deployed east of the Urals, Soviet support for the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea, and the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan). By early 1984, the Soviet Union had deployed 135 SS-20s in Asia, an increase of nearly 40 since early 1983.<sup>7</sup> A steady enhancement in the Soviet military presence in Vietnam included the stationing of TU-16 bombers in Vietnam in late 1983 and the conducting of joint Soviet-Vietnamese amphibious maneuvers along the Vietnamese coast in April 1984. In Afghanistan, Moscow stepped up both the scale and intensity of its actions against the guerrilla resistance.

At the same time, Moscow conveyed its unhappiness over the renewed warming in Sino-U.S. relations, explicitly criticizing the results of President Reagan's visit to China. In early May, harsh Soviet commentaries on renewed tensions along the Sino-Vietnamese border were followed by Moscow's abrupt postponement of the impending visit of First Deputy Premier Arkhipov to Peking, who would have been the highest level Soviet visitor to China since the border conflict of 1969. Thus, the prospects for China defining an independent foreign policy course acceptable to both Moscow and Washington remain doubtful.

Indeed, although the Chinese argue that Sino-Soviet relations and Sino-American relations are separate issues, the Soviet-American competition exerts a powerful influence on PRC security strategy. Having previously criticized the United States for its alleged appeasement of the Soviet Union, the Chinese now seem uncomfortable with an excessively confrontational atmosphere in U.S.-Soviet relations, especially heightened tensions within China's immediate security environment. In an ironic postscript to the PRC's earlier calls for strengthened U.S. resistance to "Soviet hegemonism," China has again criticized "American hegemonism," arguing that the United States is now engaged in an effort to recoup from its strategic setbacks of the 1960s and 1970s. According to the Chinese, the Reagan administration's defense strategy overemphasizes the augmentation of U.S. military power,

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<sup>7</sup>U.S. Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power*, Second Edition (March 1983), p. 34; Third Edition (April 1984), p. 50.



thus slighting the development of a peacetime political coalition to oppose Soviet actions. Yet the U.S. defense buildup also enables China to describe the present superpower balance as a stalemate, thereby providing the PRC greater maneuverability in defining a foreign policy course apart from both Washington and Moscow.

In the view of Chinese strategists, a nascent "American hegemonism" is more illusion than menace, and largely irrelevant to the long-term political, military, and economic directions of the international system.<sup>8</sup> Those Western strategists credited with "farsightedness" recognize that the prevailing direction in international politics is toward the diffusion of power. In this view, both superpowers will appear much less "super," and will need to solicit others rather than dominate them. The intermediate forces within the international system--China, Japan, and the Western European states--will begin to assume a larger political and strategic role in a multipolar international system.<sup>9</sup> These arguments, however, tend to neglect the intersecting great power interests in areas of more immediate concern for regional states such as China. The West Pacific and Northeast Asia are far too important in both strategic and economic terms to expect either superpower to relinquish its role within the region. Indeed, the Chinese understand very well that it is only the inability of "either [superpower] to achieve overwhelming superiority . . . [that] enables many countries in the intermediate zone to win more freedom of action."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>For a discerning Chinese discussion of these issues, see Zhang Jingyi, "Analysis of the Reagan Administration's Military Strategy," *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], May 5, 1983, in *FBIS-China*, May 6, 1983, pp. B1-6.

<sup>9</sup>See Zong He, "Changes and Development Trends in the International Situation," *Shijie Zhishi*, No. 11, June 1, 1983, in *FBIS-China*, July 21, 1983, pp. A1-5.

<sup>10</sup>Cheng Bifan, "U.S.-USSR Contention in the Sea of the Western Pacific," *Renmin Ribao*, January 19, 1983, in *FBIS-China*, January 20, 1983, p. A2.

## CHINA AND THE ASIAN COMMUNIST STATES

Among its six Asian communist neighbors, China enjoys reasonable relations with only North Korea. One wonders whether leaders in Peking ponder the irony that their major security challenges emanate exclusively from other communist powers, while their major economic partners are all capitalist states. As China looks increasingly to the Pacific to stimulate its economic growth, on the Asian mainland the PRC remains deeply enmeshed in major military rivalries to its north and south.

The principal difficulty for the Asian communist leaderships is that they have yet to define a non-confrontational approach to interstate relations. Even with North Korea--the only state with which China maintains a treaty entailing military obligations--relations with Peking have been subject to intermittent strain. These internecine conflicts benefit the non-communist powers of Asia, since the various communist states remain preoccupied with their mutual rivalries and antagonisms. In a long-term sense, however, it is difficult to see how the Pacific Basin nations will gain by continued polarization and conflict on the Asian mainland.

China's dealings with both Vietnam and North Korea are rooted in complicated histories that in the latter case remain virtually unknown in the West. (The profound deterioration of Sino-Vietnamese relations in the late 1970s at least provided a wealth of information from both Hanoi and Peking about their past dealings.) Among the three states, none have in their own estimation fully achieved their original political-military goals--i.e., a unified national communist state for Peking and Pyongyang, and the effective control of all of Indochina by Hanoi. All three leaderships are proud, nationalistic, and fiercely independent. The largest issue for the Chinese is whether they are prepared to accept these traits as a more or less permanent state of affairs, with leaders in North Korea and Vietnam owing China no particular deference or loyalty.

China's record to date on this issue is mixed. Relations between Vietnam and China deteriorated steadily throughout much of the 1970s, but especially after Hanoi's armies overran the south in the spring of 1975. The Chinese assert that this shift was caused exclusively by

Vietnam's arrogance and inflated territorial ambitions, abetted by Hanoi's close alignment with Moscow. Absent such a strategy of "regional hegemonism," Sino-Vietnamese relations would never have deteriorated. The bitter antagonisms expressed by both leaderships raises the issue of whether either state was capable or desirous of maintaining decent relations after the fall of Saigon.

Although leaders in both capitals have at times sought to convey hints of flexibility and a willingness to settle their differences, the troop redeployments brought about by the border hostilities of 1979 remain essentially intact. Despite periodic tensions since that time, neither side has wished to see a resumption of major hostilities. However, as developments in the spring of 1984 demonstrate, the antagonisms between China and Vietnam run very deep, and are unlikely to diminish appreciably in the foreseeable future.

Although it is impossible to prove, leaders in Peking have probably been chagrined by the determination of leaders in Hanoi to "stay the course" both in Kampuchea and with respect to Sino-Vietnamese differences. Vietnam has become increasingly dependent on the Soviet Union for both military and economic aid and must now compensate Moscow by regular access to the prized facilities at Da Nang and Cam Ranh Bay, but there is no evidence of crisis in Hanoi. The Chinese, having seen their military reputation tarnished in the unexpectedly costly border war of 1979, show little desire for a replay of that conflict, even though they continue to place the Vietnamese under military pressure. Yet the confrontation and conflict along the Vietnamese border (and the heightened Soviet encirclement to the south that it engendered) poses risks to China's broader effort to secure "a peaceful international environment." China continues its pressure along the border and is aiding the anti-Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea, but the pressure is not unrelenting. So long as both sides find the political, military, and economic costs bearable, only two possibilities seem likely to alter the *status quo*: a major realignment of the political and military forces in Kampuchea, or a major political or strategic shift among leaders in Hanoi. In the absence of such changes, both states are in a checkmate situation. The options for each are limited, with the enhanced Soviet military presence putting events in a very different context than a few years ago.

China's relations with North Korea represent a different case. It is clear that Peking takes its ties to Pyongyang very seriously. The nightmarish vision of North Korea becoming a "second Vietnam," although extremely remote, must nevertheless worry the Chinese, especially in the context of the succession to Kim Il-sung. Peking's grudging willingness to endorse the arranged succession of Kim Chong-il suggests that China's alternatives were limited and unpleasant. The visit of Kim Il-sung to Moscow in May 1984--his first official visit to the Soviet Union in more than two decades--also creates the possibility of Soviet-North Korean ties improving from their virtual non-existence at present. China has not voiced any concern about this possibility, but leaders in Pyongyang have been displeased by China's growing unofficial ties with South Korea, and may view Kim's trip to Moscow as an opportunity to diversify their sources of political support.

The security dimension of Sino-North Korean relations is also very different from Sino-Vietnamese ties. The Korean peninsula remains the one location on the Asian mainland where the United States still deploys military forces. To the Chinese, there is an uncomfortable parallel between U.S. support for South Korea and continuing American ties with Taiwan. Yet the Chinese share with the United States a fervent desire not to see a resumption of hostilities in the Korean peninsula. Chinese officials will acknowledge a common U.S. and PRC interest in stability in Korea, or at least in a continuation of the *status quo*. (China's deliveries of combat aircraft to the North during 1982 nonetheless indicated a continuing PRC concern with the balance of forces, perhaps prompted by the recent augmentation of U.S. air power in the South.) But the Chinese cannot do anything that poses a major risk to their close political relationship with North Korea, lest renewed differences with Pyongyang provide the Soviet Union a larger opportunity on the peninsula. Thus the possible enhancement of U.S. defense collaboration with the Republic of Korea causes concern in Peking, since it complicates Chinese efforts to move toward diminished tensions on the peninsula in a manner acceptable to the North. Here as well, China's room for maneuver is limited, and the potential consequences of a deterioration in Sino-North Korean relations exceedingly unpleasant to contemplate.

The real tests in Sino-North Korean relations, however, most likely must await the death of Kim Il-song. Will the Chinese seek to persuade North Korea to redirect its political and economic policies, much as China did after the death of Mao? Will China then be prepared to incur greater risks with respect to accepting the reality of two Korean states? And how would these changes be likely to influence Chinese perceptions of the U.S. military role in Northeast Asia? The continuing division of the Korean peninsula typifies China's bifurcated political world--the intersection of China's involvements in decades-long Asian conflicts with the new opportunities that exist in the Pacific Basin.

### CHINA AND THE PACIFIC BASIN

The largest issues faced by the states and societies in the Pacific Basin in relation to China concern the PRC's efforts at accommodation with its non-communist neighbors. China's dealings with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong each represent separate and special cases, yet they share common characteristics. The latter three societies hope that China will accord them a recognition and respect that parallels what has developed between China and Japan over the past decade. The outlook for regional stability will be very bleak if the delicate, complicated issues between China and its immediate neighbors are handled poorly.

The Chinese at present confront several competing choices. They recognize the political, economic, and security benefits enjoyed by virtue of closer ties with the Pacific and diminished tensions with the United States. They also appreciate the potential implications of a reversion to a regional security environment where U.S. and Chinese objectives are in fundamental conflict. One Chinese authority has noted that "if China and the United States regress to a similar kind of opposition and aggression to that which existed between them during the 1950s and 1960s, then the consequences for the Asian-Pacific region and the rest of the world will be very serious and difficult to predict."<sup>11</sup> Yet the Chinese do not acknowledge that their actions could contribute directly to such a retrogression.

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<sup>11</sup>Pei Monong, "China's Future Role in Asia," op. cit., p. A6.

The handling of the Taiwan and Hong Kong issues in particular will reveal a great deal about the long-term directions of Chinese policy. To the PRC, these issues represent two of the final, unresolved questions blocking the unity of the entire Chinese state. The Chinese are turning to powerful, emotive symbols of patriotism and Chinese nationalism in an effort to achieve at least symbolic reunification of Hong Kong and Taiwan with the mainland. By promising substantial autonomy and latitude for the existing political and economic systems, the PRC leadership seems to believe that it has made offers that no reasonable party could refuse.<sup>12</sup> These proposals virtually preclude coercive means to achieve reunification, and they tacitly acknowledge that the mainland's present economic system is inappropriate for either Taiwan or Hong Kong.

Such overtures are intended to demonstrate China's sincerity and reasonability to the United States and Japan, for these two states constitute the linchpin of Chinese strategy in the Pacific Basin. It is impossible to determine whether Deng and other Chinese leaders believe that their appeals will be greeted positively by the populations of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Deng may believe that, in conjunction with the political and economic reforms underway within China (in particular China's recently announced plans to expand greatly the special economic zones in China's coastal regions), the differences between the mainland, Hong Kong, and Taiwan will gradually narrow, thereby ultimately permitting reintegration of these separate systems.

Even as Deng implies a "live and let live" attitude, he also understands that there are limits beyond which he is not prepared to pledge China's forbearance. But he also understands that any recourse to a more coercive strategy would be fundamentally destabilizing to political and economic relations in the West Pacific. So long as China maintains a compelling need for good relations with the United States

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<sup>12</sup>See Derek Davies, "A Leap Into the Dark," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 3, 1984, pp. 14-16; Michael Weisskopf, "Taiwan's Role in a United China Would Be Equal, Deng Pledges," *Washington Post*, July 19, 1983; idem, "New Proposals From Peking Being Offered to Taiwan," *ibid.*, July 30, 1983; and David Bonavia, "The Bait for Taiwan," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 3, 1984, pp. 14-15.

and Japan, one can only hope this will temper and restrain China from considering alternative approaches.

Such issues, however, cut both ways. The United States, pressed with major defense responsibilities on multiple fronts, can ill afford to consider the implications of again preparing for conflict contingencies involving the PRC. In this sense, policymakers in Washington confront the singular opportunity of China focused principally on its internal economic reconstruction, generally supportive of U.S. regional goals, and opposed to the expansion of Soviet power. For the interests of all those in the Pacific Basin, it is an opportunity that must not be squandered.

The Asia-Pacific region today represents a major success for U.S. political, economic, and strategic interests, and China is a principal factor in that success. Despite the intermittent difficulties of managing relations with the PRC, there is an enormous disparity between the strident, confrontationist, xenophobic China of the late 1960s and early 1970s and a nation that now admits to compelling economic and technological needs from the West, without the Soviet Union representing a credible alternative. Yet there are continuing issues over which scholarly and governmental opinion remain divided. At the risk of some oversimplification, are the Chinese in such difficult straits and with so few options that the present context of U.S.-Chinese relations will remain more or less intact no matter what the U.S. policy toward Peking? Or does benign neglect or worse endanger the gains of the past decade, in particular China's role as a stabilizing regional force, to the consequent disadvantage of U.S. allies and friends in the Pacific?

There are reasonable prospects for policy continuity in China, but there are also imponderables. Displaced and disgruntled politicians may be eagerly awaiting Deng's passage from the scene; these may well include some within the military ranks and other elements of centralized state control who look with disfavor on many of the economic and political developments of recent years.<sup>13</sup> Some may be far more

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<sup>13</sup>For a suggestive interpretation, see Susan L. Shirk, "The Domestic Political Dimensions of China's Foreign Economic Relations," in Samuel S. Kim (ed.), *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy in the Post-Mao Era*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1984.

suspicious than Deng about the benefits of close association with the West. Others may take seriously the notion of the United States as a resurgently hegemonic power that will seek to dominate Northeast Asia, to the detriment of Chinese interests. Consideration of such uncertainties must occupy a central place in any analysis of politics and security in the Pacific Basin, all the more so in view of the very different roles China assumed in prior decades. These questions nevertheless are of a very different order from the ones posed in the past. They suggest how far we have already come with China, but also how far we still have to go.



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